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**GAINING MOMENTUM: MARITIME SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC
REGION**

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**OPENING REMARKS AT PLENARY SESSION ON “GAINING
MOMENTUM: MARITIME SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC
REGION”**

I am glad to note that there is an inordinate amount of interest in Maritime Security at this conference. Maritime security is an issue of critical importance to all countries of the Asia-Pacific. Some of the world's most important shipping lanes and trade routes, including the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, straddle archipelagic Southeast Asia. Half of the world's oil passes through these waterways and the majority of Asia-Pacific countries are maritime trading nations. Being the world's busiest container port, Singapore in particular takes threats to maritime security and maritime trade very seriously. Ensuring the security of strategic sea lines of communications is of vital importance for economic growth, continuity of global trade and regional stability.

Several questions have been asked about whether the threat of maritime terrorism is real. In Singapore we are working on the premise that there is a clear and present danger. The Cole and Limburg incidents have taken place. Pioneering work has also been done by the LTTE in the area of maritime

terrorism. Jemaah Islamiyah detainees have spoken of their intention to target maritime targets in Singapore waters. There is also anecdotal evidence of preparations for a maritime attack in the Malacca Straits. According to an Aegis intelligence report, a chemical tanker was hijacked for several hours by a band of pirates last year with the sole intention of familiarizing themselves with piloting the vessel in the Malacca Straits. There is also an increase in the sophistication of pirate attacks in regional waters. Pirates have been using automatic weapons and have planned their attacks with great precision.

But why hasn't an attack occurred? An attack may take years to conceive and rehearse. The various efforts taken to harden merchant vessels may also have had a salutary effect on terrorist organisations. The sustained campaign against terrorists may also have helped prevent the nexus between piracy and maritime terrorism. Finally, it may just be pure luck.

I appreciate the positive comments made by several speakers at the session on Port Security yesterday about the efforts taken by the Singapore government to enhance maritime security. In a sense, these efforts are critical given the immense importance of the Malacca Straits and the Singapore Straits to the economy of Singapore.

To manage traditional seaborne threats such as piracy and armed robbery against ships, and emerging threats such as maritime terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Singapore has on its part implemented various security measures and raised the baseline for maritime security since 9/11. I will mention a few examples here. Within our territorial waters, we have put in place an integrated surveillance and information network to track and investigate any suspicious movement in our waters. The Navy provides selective escorts of high-value merchant vessels. The Navy has also put in place a number of contingency plans to deal with a variety of situations at sea. Singapore's approach to maritime security is essentially one that is coordinated and one that is based on a series of prevention, protection and response measures. Our overall efforts are coordinated by a national-level Maritime Security Task Force.

Efforts on our own, however, would not be adequate given that maritime security is a complex issue and is of a transnational nature. Singapore recognizes the challenges associated with regional and international cooperation in maritime security issues. Where possible, and within international legal frameworks and respecting the territorial sovereignty of

other countries, we will explore new avenues to work with regional partners, key stakeholders as well as international organizations such as the IMO to enhance the maritime security and safety of strategic waterways.

Multilateral or bilateral cooperation is not something new. With regional countries, for example, our Navy has been co-operating with the Indonesians through the Indonesia-Singapore Coordinated Patrols to safeguard the security of the Singapore Straits. The three littoral states Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia also recently launched the MALSINDO Coordinated Patrols to enhance security in the Malacca Straits. There have been questions relating to the effectiveness of these patrols. Let me put it this way. It is a start and we hope to move beyond this to enhance intelligence exchange and have better situational awareness in the Malacca Straits.

Beyond these, we have cooperated with the IMO in the implementation of the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code. We have also been working closely with the US in programmes such as the Container Security Initiative to screen high-risk containers for WMD material. Singapore has also joined the core group of countries participating in the Proliferation Security Initiative. There is a plethora of maritime security initiatives out

there. Some may say this is a fragmented approach but I would like to refer to these initiatives as compartmentalized and focused. And they need to be for the initial period of implementation. What I would like to see is some fusion and synthesis over the longer term. The ideal would be an amalgamation of these various initiatives into some sort of a pilot project that looks into the security of an entire supply chain.

Singapore also recognizes the importance of building up multilateral frameworks of cooperation through Track I and Track II activities. One notable recent success was the agreement by the Defence Ministers of the Five Power Defence Arrangements – which brings together Singapore, Malaysia, the UK, Australia and New Zealand – to expand the scope of its activities to include non-conventional security threats, such as maritime terrorism. The ASEAN Regional Forum too can play an important role to forge regional cooperation on maritime security as it brings together countries in the region including the littoral states of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia as well as key extra-regional countries like the US, India, China and Japan. In fact, Singapore and the US will be co-hosting an ARF confidence building workshop on “Regional Co-operation in Maritime Security” in March 2005, to help identify regional maritime strategies for responding to the security

threats. It is good to note that there has been increasing interest and focus on maritime security issues in such multilateral groupings.

Maritime security is at the top of the list of Singapore's priorities. It is a complex issue and the threats are real. On our part, we would be happy to share our experiences, and to cooperate with like-minded countries in ensuring that the seas remain safe.

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